The beating of his hideous heart

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The beating of his hideous heart

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Summary

The Chesapeake Ripper left a bouquet of flowers, spilling out of a body. Hannibal and Will are growing closer. It wasn't supposed to go this way.

Notes

June 27 - | Obsession | Display |

It wasn't supposed to go this way. Everything had been going perfectly, better than expected.

Will had finally taken him up on his offer of dinner, and Hannibal had planned it to suit his tastes and preferences. Simplistic and hearty, three courses. He felt like a child, stubbornly repeating the same thing as if it would make it true, but it genuinely wasn't supposed to go this way. He'd wanted more, and he regretted the path he'd been forced down in a way he rarely had cause to do.

Will smiled at the spread of food, enjoying the clear pride that rolled off Hannibal as he presented each plate for his consideration. It was rare that he could read any emotion off of Hannibal with any certainty, rarer still that Hannibal would be this free with his emotions. It felt like a gift on top of the home cooked meal, something rarely given to anyone else.

The food was delicious, and the conversation flowed freely, from discussion of his classes, the opera Hannibal had intended, which led neatly into an invitation to attend the opera alongside Hannibal, and his plate was cleared before he noticed that the time had passed.

"Thank you, Hannibal, I think I needed this dinner."

"Of course, what else are friends for if not to provide a respite from the world?" Hannibal led them into his study, leaving Will to wander as he often did while he went to his liquor cabinet to pour wine for them, a rich red.

Will enjoyed the freedom Hannibal allowed him with his things. He knew Hannibal was fastidious in his neatness, and that he was likely the only one allowed to move through his space this freely, without threat of that disapproving glare being leveled at him. He traced his finger along the spines of the books, noting the ones he'd read himself, and translating the French titles.

He hadn't been lying, this dinner was a welcome respite from work. Jack had been breathing down his neck more than ever now that the Chesapeake Ripper was back. Long days and early mornings, not to mention the scenes he looked at, were taking their toll.

Maybe that was why it took him so long to figure it out. He'd pulled one of the French books out, it was a book on flower language, of all things. Innocent. Except that a page was bookmarked, of a flower he'd seen before. It looked like a white rose, but the petals were different. Apparently, it meant happiness. He paused, frowning, and tried to puzzle out where he'd seen it as Hannibal returned with their wine.

He replaced the book, turning to take the wine glass from Hannibal before he continued his wanderings. The man leaned against his desk, watching Will with his usual reserved intensity. He liked it, in a way he wasn't used to. He'd grown used to people's attention young, at first just because he was different, and later because they wanted to study him. Hannibal's attention was different, more… possessive almost. It felt more like a blanket, heavy and constant, then the daggers he was used to.

Hannibal's study was far more comfortable than his office, although it was still very much impersonal, or, not impersonal so much as imposing. Dark and rich, full of oddities that matched far better than they should. It fit Hannibal well, made his suits and pretentiousness seem at home.

His mind wandered unbidden back to the last Ripper scene, the one found yesterday. A man on his knees, pierced with blades and stabbed through with poles, both decorative and to hold him in position, with flowers bursting from every wound, and from his open chest. He'd only recognized a couple, honeysuckle and daffodils, among the arrangement of color. Beverly was supposed to analyze them for prints, which would take forever. That's where he'd seen the flower from the book- cape jasmine. It had been one of the flowers pouring from the dead man's wounds. Which suggested that the other flowers had some sort of meaning as well, and he should message Beverly, they could- but- another thought interrupted the first, making Will grow cold- Hannibal hadn't been at the scene. And even if Will had mentioned the flowers at dinner, Hannibal wouldn't have had time to look them up in his book.

Hannibal already knew about the flowers. It looped in his head as he stared blankly at the bookshelves he'd been scanning. Hannibal already knew about the flowers. He couldn't force himself to complete the thought, to answer the question of how Hannibal knew, because there was only one real answer.

Hannibal hummed from behind him, closer than Will had expected. He'd noticed Will freeze, maybe.

"Will? Are you quite alright? If you are feeling unwell, I'd feel remiss as a host if you didn't tell me."

"I- uh. The flowers, at the scene. Cape jasmine?"
He couldn't force the whole question out, couldn't make himself turn and ask Hannibal to his face if he was… what Will thought he was. There was a pit in his stomach, and it kept stretching deeper, and with one wrong move he'd fall in, and be caught.

"A fascinating flower, as far as they come. Hardy and fragrant. Dear old Jack sent some photos of the crime scene my way."

A plausible explanation, a reassuring one. One that boarded over the pit in his stomach, and might even allow him to sleep tonight. But he'd come practically straight here from the crime scene. There hadn't been pictures to send yet, and for all of Hannibal's gifts, he'd been busy with cooking even before Will arrived.

Hannibal knew all of that too, and he knew Will was smart enough to figure that out. Which meant he wasn't trying to deceive Will. He was trying to plead with him. Let this go, let me pull the wool over your eyes just this once, I don't want to lose this anymore than you do. And Will wanted to, so badly. He could smile, make a joke or a comment about Jack and his work ethic, and maybe he'd be allowed to leave. And then another body would drop, and another, and Will… Will would break with it, caught between loyalty to Jack, to his morals, and everything he felt for Hannibal.

He already relied on Hannibal as a crutch for his empathy, stealing a version of his countenance to view the world through when it all became too much. If that countenance became the Rippers, if the only shelter Will had was that of a serial killer, he'd lose himself. Maybe not quickly, not if Hannibal decided to guide it, but he would, and by the time Hannibal was through, he'd be something else entirely, something that killed like the Ripper, gleefully and without mercy.

Turn. Smile. Accept it. He'd enjoy it eventually, he knew he would. Hannibal would make sure of it.

He screwed his eyes shut, trying almost to wake himself up from the nightmare he'd found himself in. He couldn't do it, and he knew that, and that fantasy future would never come true.

"Hannibal," he choked out, "I-."

Hannibal sighed, and sounded genuinely disappointed. "I had hoped it wouldn't come to this, my dear Will."

It was enough to break Will from his stupor. Will ran, a prey animal finally realizing he was in the den of a very, very dangerous predator.

Hannibal's house was a maze, and he knew it much better than Will did. The hallway branched, and he veered left, towards the front of the house. If he got out, he could call for help, or be seen by someone maybe. It had been dark out when he'd arrived, and he'd been here for hours. Any neighbor would be asleep, and even if they weren't, might ignore the sound of yelling. He'd driven, but his keys were in his jacket, hung in a closet by Hannibal, who was quickly closing on him. Fuck.

He was slammed into the hardwood of the hallway, tackled from behind by Hannibal. His head hit the ground, stunning him for a second, before he began fighting. Growling, he tried to twist in his grip, clawing blindly at the man. He twisted enough to knee him, knocking the man off balance enough to free himself, then he was running again.

Second left, first right, why was this fucking house so big, and he was in the dining room, the front door was in sight but so was the kitchen, and there was no guarantee of rescue if he made it outside but there were knives in the kitchen to defend himself with, and the second of conflict had cost him his lead on Hannibal, who was breathing heavily and getting closer, and he ran for the kitchen.

The knife block was shoved behind him, out reach of Hannibal following him, as he grabbed a knife from it. It was long and thin, meant to saw at meat. It would do.

They faced each other, panting, in the kitchen. Hannibal was bleeding sluggishly from the claw marks Will had made on his wrists and face. Will was lightheaded, likely concussed, and both were armed, Will with his knife and Hannibal with a scalpel.

"Don't make this difficult, Will. I am certain we can reach an accord."

Will shook his head, ignoring the spots of pain it caused. “You’re the Ripper. You killed- all of those people, and I, I didn’t even see it.”

He was shaking, and Hannibal’s mask was up again, soothing and calm, like Will was the one who was losing it here, like Will was the dangerous one.

“Will,” he said again, quieter, as he moved forward slowly. Like approaching a wild animal. Will let his body shake, let tears fall, but kept ahold of his knife.

As soon as Hannibal got close enough, he struck, lunging forward with his blade, burying the knife in Hannibal’s shoulder, realizing too late that Hannibal had been ready to stab him as well, and he had flung himself into his blade as Hannibal dug his scalpel into Will’s stomach, carving deep and wide.

It burned, and the pain was enough to make Will release his knife, fingers going limp. Hannibal cradled him, shushing him and murmuring reassurances and apologies as he lowered Will to the floor. He was going numb, feeling freeing his body, and it was becoming hard to hear Hannibal, hard to feel him even where he pressed hands to Will’s stomach, tears falling onto Will’s face.

He saw Hannibal crying, as if from a distance, hazy and softened by the tears in his own eyes. He thought, in that far away sort of way, that this was the first time he’d seen Hannibal cry, and that this, much like his attention, was something for Will alone. A gift that Will wished he’d have had the chance to appreciate. Maybe, in another world, he could have.

This wasn’t supposed to happen. He had had plans, wanted to mold Will and guide him, wanted to see him resplendent and unapologetic, standing over a kill of his own. He’d wanted a companion, and equal. Not this, not holding the man’s organs in because in his rage and panic he’d cut far deeper then he meant to.

He begged Will, and hated himself for it. Pleading with the man to forgive him, to stay with him, even as he lowered him to the floor, cradling him. It didn’t matter. Will gasped, and trembled, and his breathing slowed until it stopped completely. Hannibal held his hands to his stomach anyway, still begging Will for forgiveness as his eyes glazed. He held him there until he had to move, because the meat would spoil otherwise, and he couldn’t lose Will and not have the chance to take something of the man with him.

He moved Will’s body down to the basement, laid him on the table and arranged him like he was sleeping. He turned, meaning to grab the bone saw, but his eye caught on the castoffs of his last display, not yet disposed of, and his breath caught, grief overtaking him. Flowers, slightly wilted now.

They’d been meant as a gift to Will. Cape Jasmine, happiness. Tulips, love. Daffodils, return my affection. White dittany of Crete, passion. Honeysuckle, devoted affection. A display that would show Will he was interested, opened the door to something more between them. It wasn’t meant to be the thing that led to his death. Beautiful, unpredictable boy, he thought fondly, tears falling freely.

He would take as much as he could from Will, consume him and keep him close. With the rest, he'd make a display. It would follow the last, mirror it, although Will was far more important to him than the banker he'd used for the last one. He would immortalize him, beautiful and surrounded by flowers of grief and love, pain and betrayal. Outlining his plan did not, could not, distract him from his grief.

Will was gone, would never wander his study or office, would never match wits with him, never smile at Hannibal like they were pulling the most delicious prank whenever he made a reference no else understood. He would never get the chance to become. Hannibal would remain alone.

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